CEDRIC THE SAXON

BY

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK



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"AND CEDRIC GREW WHITE AS HE STOOD WAITING FOR HAL TO REACH HIM."

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HARRIET T. COMSTOCK



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CEDRIC THE SAXON

CHAPTER I

The book fell unheeded from my hand. The firelight flickered through the gathering gloom, and, with a sigh of content, I sank back in my easy-chair, and, in imagination, lived among the heroes about whom I had been reading in the old time-stained history.

From the shadowy corners savage sea-kings loomed fierce and terrible. Loyal knights in shining armor passed before me, the points of their glittering spears flashed in my eyes, and their war-cry sounded in my ears.

Pious monks, too, followed in their wake —monks who fed the poor, prayed for the erring and soothed the dying, and yet when

duty called went out to battle, undaunted and undismayed, even when they knew defeat was sure.

From all the conflict and misery of that far-away time, the story of little Saxon Cedric shines out like a star amid billows of darkest clouds.

In the quiet and comfort of my cosy room, I seem to feel the clasp of his slender fingers on mine—those little fingers so willing to soothe and comfort—and they seem to draw me back into the almost forgotten time, to wander with him over the rough and dangerous paths where his painful steps once patiently wandered.

I follow you as best I may, dear, faithful little lad, and, although my eyes are dim at the memory of your trials and sorrows, I smile with joy at the thought that you, too, fought a brave, good fight, and gained a glorious victory.

I see him first as he stood, one autumn morning, by the gates of a beautiful old monastery in Lincolnshire, England. A long gray mantle covered his slender form, and trailed upon the gay autumn leaves which strewed the ground. The hood of the mantle fell away from his golden head like a vapor, leaving his delicate face exposed in the full light of that glorious day.

The mantle belonged to Brother Ambrose, whose duty it was to stand at the gate during certain hours of the day, and give directions to travellers, or to admit any who needed food and shelter.

Now, Brother Ambrose was a dwarf, and very old. He was not always as even-tempered as one could desire, and this gate duty was not to his taste. He better liked to stroll away with Thomas, the gardener, and gossip of the past, that wonderful past about which they spoke in whispers; and so

he often threw his mantle over the willing shoulders of little Cedric, who was almost as tall as he, while he wandered away to enjoy life after his own fashion.

"Folks shouldn't roam at large unless they know their whereabouts," he used to mutter, gruffly. "To keep a body busy just telling them their mistakes is a crying shame, say I. And as for the hungry, bah! They know the way all too well to the Abbey kitchen. Empty stomachs are keen guides."

Any one, from a distance, seeing the gray mantle at the gates, might reasonably suppose that Ambrose was doing his duty. The occasional traveller who sought directions took them from the beautiful boy unquestioningly, and the more frequent villager who came for charity was only too glad to encounter Cedric instead of Brother Ambrose. The old dwarf was too sharp for them, his questions often sent them shamefacedly

away, while Cedric's smile was ever ready, and his voice full of generous welcome.

So no real harm was done, and the privilege meant very much to the child. Was there not always the chance of Hal the Fleet-foot coming to beg?

To be sure, he never came unless direct necessity drove him there, for Hal was a wild rover, and cared not for quiet, orderly ways. But he was only twelve years old, and hunger was a cruel companion, and when it pressed too near, Hal fled to the monastery, knowing that there he would find food and drink, with a possible dainty saved from Cedric's more delicate fare. And Cedric was not to be despised, either, when more exciting society failed.

Who heard his wild tales with more absorbing interest than Cedric? And who gave so fully the flattering adoration for which his untamed nature craved? And if Cedric

had that attraction for Hal, what can be said of the devouring longing with which the lonely child of the monastery watched and waited day by day for his wild friend?

Hal knew all the news for miles around. Nothing ever escaped his eye or ear. He was everywhere, knew every one, and belonged to none. No one was as fleet as he to carry the news abroad. He was a bitter foe and a loyal friend, honest, courageous, and full of fun, like a wild animal in many ways, but tender-hearted withal.

To the fathers he was a source of doubt and interest; to Cedric he was little less than a wonder. He had not been to the monastery now for many days, and Cedric was getting anxious.

"Is he not hungry enough to come to-day?" he murmured, peering eagerly down the rugged path. "Six whole days! I suppose it is because the nuts are beginning to

ripen. I never did like the autumn." And then the little boy stepped outside the gate to get a further view.

As he did so, it appeared that he was lame, the left foot dragged slightly behind the other.

He listened for Hal's well-known whistle. Hal never came showing the pangs of hunger that were clutching at his vitals, but always with a cheery, happy air, as of one idly passing that way.

But Cedric heard no welcome trill, and was about to turn wearily away, when a sudden sharp crackling of the dry leaves caused him to look in the opposite direction.

From the depths of the forest came Hal, his loose clothing fluttering in rags about him, and his long, dark hair blowing around his face. He ran lightly forward. It was not hunger that showed in his thin features now; it was fear, deadly fear, and Cedric

grew white as he stood waiting for Hal to reach him. The panting boy gained his side, and dropped on the leaves at his feet.

For a moment Hal could not speak, and with strange, unchildlike patience, Cedric smoothed the tangled hair upon his damp brow and whispered, gently: "Poor dear Hal, how weary thou art!"

With terror-filled eyes Hal gazed into the tender face above him, then he gasped: "Get thee down close to me. I have news indeed. Quick, quick, there is but a little time!"

Cedric pressed beside him, the golden head and the rough black one side by side.

"The Danes!" hissed Hal, "with awful Hubba at their head. They have destroyed Bardney; every father was slain. No one warned them, they were surprised just at vespers. Then the Danes crossed Witham—they are marching this way. Go thee, tell Father Tolius—he used to fight—he has not

forgotten. I will go to the castle——" Here Hal's voice failed him, but his great eyes blazed feverishly.

"Yes! yes!" whispered Cedric, his low voice vibrating with fear. "The Earl of Algar will save us, he is brave and strong. Go, go, Hal dear; but first eat. See, I have bread and cake for thee, here behind the vines, and wine, too, Hal. See, I have saved them for four days. Thou hast been so very long!"

The starving boy snatched the food and drink and devoured them, then sprang up and darted on. For a moment Cedric watched him, half dazed; then he turned, and, as quickly as he could, for his lameness held him back, ran through the park to the monastery.

CHAPTER II

As Cedric ran limpingly on, he heard the bell tolling for vespers, and through the still autumn air there floated the sound of the low-voiced chant, as the fathers marched with bowed heads down the shadowy nave. Father Tolius, a monk who had once been a famous warrior, stood by the altar, his calm, saintly face gleaming in the pale light.

The massive doors of the abbey stood open, and at last Cedric reached them and ran in: "Father, father!" he shrieked, with his eyes fixed on Father Tolius, "the Danes! They have crossed the river! They are coming here! Hal Fleetfoot has gone to the castle——" the words ended in a broken sob, and Cedric sank exhausted upon the stone floor.

No one heeded him, for in an instant all was wild confusion. Each man understood the import of Cedric's terrified words, and from every side an agonized cry went up: "The Danes! The Danes!" Over the face of Father Tolius a change came. The meek eyes blazed, the pale cheek flushed, he threw back his splendid head, and his blood rushed through his veins as it used to in the years gone by. Suddenly his voice rang out like a blast: "In the name of God, who follows me?"

"I! I! I!" came in wild chorus, and the shouting monks pressed around him.

Cedric listened to the tumult like one in a dream. Strange orders were given, and hurried questions asked. Then came a mad rush from the chapel. The bell tolled solemnly on, for the ringer was deaf and blind and knew not that the old order of things was changed. But he alone thought of holy things; all the others were eager to follow

their brave leader, and to defend with their lives the faith, and their beloved abbey.

Cedric followed the last of the monks out, and for hours, while the excitement waxed higher and higher, he crouched in a deep window-seat of a long gallery and trembled with terror.

Early in the evening two officers arrived with a message from the Earl of Algar. They said that the inhabitants of the village had been aroused by Hal, and that they were ready to join forces with the monks and fight bravely to the end. Then a great cheer went up!

Cedric stood in his dark corner and shouted for Hal, his dear, brave Hal, who had come in time to save them all! For who could withstand the fierce earl and Father Tolius, and all the strong villagers? Surely, the Danes would be driven back, and taught a terrible lesson.

Fear fled from Cedric's heart, and pride filled it. Oh! if he were only old enough to go and follow Father Tolius! But he could be patient and lend his aid. So he left his window corner and helped the others polish the shields and axes. He ran his slim white fingers over the glittering spear points, and laughed aloud as he saw how sharp they were.

At last the preparations were finished; all who could fight were gone; the beautiful abbey was left to the older fathers, and a few younger ones who could defend them and the sacred treasures should need arise.

How quiet and strange it was! Cedric wandered about the deserted passages, and wondered what Hal was doing out in the dark night among those fierce, wild men.

Finally, he strolled into the library. This was a magnificent room and contained the largest and rarest collection of books in

England. It was a room that Cedric loved, but now the dim, shadowy outlines filled him with awe.

At the farther end by a fire of blazing logs, he saw the old prior sitting. His head was bowed upon his worn hand, and Cedric knew that he was lost in sorrowful thoughts. There was a great love between these two, and so now, quite fearlessly, Cedric went down the long room, and laid a gentle hand upon the father's arm.

"I am lonely," he faltered, "and afraid—may I sit by thee?"

The grave face turned toward him. "I, too, am lonely, my son, but not afraid, for the Lord of Hosts is my God! Come, child, sit thou upon my knee, thou hast no mother to still thy fears. Poor little lad!" And the kind eyes beamed softly into the trusting blue ones raised to meet their gaze.

"Thou art like thy mother, Cedric," the

old voice went on; "she was a saintly woman."

"Didst thou know my mother, father? Oh, tell me of her!" broke in the eager voice. Through all his uneventful childhood, Cedric had never questioned his past. He could not remember another home, nor other love than that which the good fathers had given him, and he had been very happy. But now all was changed. The air was full of mystery and doubt, and he seemed a part of it all; he began to think, and question. "Who was my mother, father, and where is she now?"

"She was the noblest lady in all England, and the most beautiful. She was the Lady Mary Devon!" The silvered head bent reverently. "Thy father, Earl Devon, child, was a warrior, and died upon the field defending his king. When thy mother was left alone, she remembered me—she knew that she could trust me. One night—it was upon a Christ-

mas Eve—as I sat here among my books alone, I raised my eyes, and down the long room I saw—a vision! A woman with a white, sad face came toward me, bearing in her arms a young, young child. I thought I dreamed, and that the Holy Ones were with me on Their night. I stood up with outstretched arms, awaiting a blessing. And then I felt a warm, soft burden on my hands, and that dear, long-lost voice said: 'All else is taken; I, too, must go. For the sake of the past——' " here the old father drew in a sharp breath, and Cedric started at the sudden pause; when the quivering voice took up the tale, there was a new note in it.

"She felt that thy affliction"—the boy flushed—"would unfit thee for following in thy father's ways, and she besought me to train thee for the holy life; to prepare thee to do battle with unseen foes of passion and desire. Not all battles are fought behind

shields, my son—there are others which must be fought with bared heart and spearless hand. She gave me this jewelled ring that night. I have worn it next my heart, until now." The father drew the glittering circlet forth, hung on a slender chain, and dropped it upon Cedric's neck.

"Wear it from now until thy death, dear child, in remembrance of her—and me. I have loved thee, Cedric, how well only God can know. It was a blessing indeed thy mother brought to me that Christmas Eve. Tell me that, when temptations arise, thou wilt forget thyself and do thy duty, and so gain the victory through our Blessed Lord?"

The boy slipped from the prior's knee, and, standing before the fire with uplifted hand, said, solemnly: "In that time, father, will I remember thee and my mother." The golden head bent low, and the silvered one bending above it pressed against it with tenderness.

Suddenly a low whistle startled them. But it was a familiar sound to Cedric. He turned joyfully around, and in the far corner discerned the form of Hal Fleetfoot. Cedric ran eagerly to him and dragged him to the prior's chair.

Hal dropped his eyes in reverence, and shuffled his feet restlessly. But all differences of station were forgotten in that terrible hour.

"What news, Hal? Speak up!" said the prior; he leaned toward the ragged boy and scanned his face by the fire's glow.

"They are ready," answered the tired young voice; "they are waiting for the daylight. The Danes are not far off—they know not that the alarm has been given." Then the boy's fine eyes blazed proudly. "They will not slay us as they did the others at Lindsay and Bardney—I got here in time!"

"Yes, yes!" murmured the prior. "Thou

didst indeed. Thou art a brave and loyal lad, Hal. Go, Cedric, take him and give him of the best. He needs it sorely. And then show him to a good bed. Forget your fears, children; remember that there is One greater than all these foes—and He is watching unceasingly."

After the meal—and it was a royal meal—the boys strolled away to a turret chamber, and for hours talked, as boys will, of their longings and hopes. The deeds of bravery which they would accomplish, the courage which they would show, and of the glorious victories which were to crown their every act.

"See," whispered Cedric, showing Hal the sparkling ring hung about his neck. "'Twas my mother's! The prior hath given it to me. I doubt not, Hal, but that it is a talisman; mayhap I have but to wish, and my desire will come. List!" Cedric rose to his

feet, and stood in the pale moonlight with uplifted face. "I wish that I might be brave as my father, and as strong, so that I might follow the earl!"

The moonbeams shone on the upturned face, the golden token lay on the outstretched palm, and the waiting boys breathed quickly. But no miracle came. Cedric sank down among the shadows and Hal crept to his side.

"They will not fight until the daylight," he said, after a long, eloquent pause, going to the little window and peering out into the silent moonlit night. "And I tell thee, Cedric, our side will lay them low." Then the fierce young voice sank in awe. "I, too, shall fight. Yes, I will go out at break of day. When the battle begins I shall take a shield and spear from some dead Dane, and I will show them all what Hal the Fleetfoot can do. And after the battle, Cedric, the



"I WISH THAT I MIGHT BE BRAVE AS MY FATHER, AND AS STRONG, SO THAT I MIGHT FOLLOW THE EARL."

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earl himself will give me such trophies as thou hast never seen in thy life. For they say that the Danes are laden with jewels and gold, and we shall have them all!"

"Oh!" murmured Cedric, "how mighty thou art, Hal! I could never be afraid near thee. Take me with thee, dear, dear Hal—let me fight, too; I will be so brave!"

"Take thee!" laughed Hal. "What could'st thou do, poor lad, with thy lame leg? Warriors are not made of such as thou."

The pale face flushed painfully, and the large eyes filled with tears, but Hal noticed not.

"I could help," quivered the mild voice. "I could bring water to the wounded, and stay behind by the dying. They might not feel so lonely if even a little boy was near."

Hal put his arm about the slender figure beside him. Something in his rough nature stirred at the brave words; he clasped the

little fingers, and said: "I believe thou hast the stoutest heart among us all. We can neither of us fight. I am but a boastful lout. But I tell thee what, Cedric, I know of a hiding-place, near where the battle is like to be; I will take thee thither, and there will we hide, and we may see it all!"

Cedric grasped the stronger hand. "How good thou art!" he whispered.

And so they nestled down together on the bed, and, because they were children, they fell peacefully asleep, while their elders neither slumbered nor slept—with the knowledge of what the awful hours held in store for them.

CHAPTER III

Just at the breaking of the gray dawn, Hal awoke. "Come," he breathed into Cedric's ear, "we must be up and away!"

Cedric started violently. He had been dreaming of his mother, the mother whom he never knew—but in his dream he had seen her quite clearly. She was beautiful as the holy Mother, and she had held him in her arms, and whispered to him of her love. And so it was with a cruel start that he awoke to the realizing sense of the chill morn and of Hal's firm clutch upon his arm, and all that they implied. His teeth chattered and his lips grew blue.

"Thou art afraid!" Hal laughed softly. "Thou canst remain here, *I* need thee not!"

"I am not afraid!" replied Cedric, with

flashing eyes; and then, softly: "I could never be afraid, dear Hal, if thou wert near."

They had saved some cakes from their evening meal, and, after eating these, they stole forth hand in hand. Hal was a true child of the woods, and ran lightly on, dragging Cedric after him. It was a painful journey to the lame boy. He often had to set his teeth to keep back the moan which rose to his lips. Yet not for his life would he have admitted his misery, and, in his thoughtless boyhood, good-natured Hal strode on unconscious of the suffering that his little comrade was so bravely enduring.

At last the hiding-place was reached. It was a slightly elevated bit of ground, covered with thick underbrush. The boys sank down among the sedges and branches, and, after a moment's rest, leaned over and peered down upon the plain below.

Nothing broke the stillness of the early morn.

"Where are they?" whispered Cedric, a disappointed pain filling his heart.

"In hiding," Hal whispered back. "Who knows so well as the earl and Father Tolius the best places? But look, look!" he suddenly ejaculated, "there!" pointing off into the distance.

Cedric looked, and saw a dim moving mass. It appeared like a cloud of dust driven before a strong wind.

Just then the sun broke forth, and something in that strange mass caught the reflection, and glittered.

"The shields of the Danes!" Hal cried, in hoarse tones, and Cedric clung to his hand. In silence they strained their eyes and watched.

The mass grew in size as it drew nearer. As the boys gazed, the body of advancing

men seemed to part, one division going to the left, and the smaller of the two hastening forward.

On, on they came. Evidently they expected no resistance, and advanced fearlessly.

Cedric's breath came short and heavy, and Hal's strong young body quivered with excitement. Suddenly the bushes below began to move; and cautiously from out the hiding-places broke the forces of the Earl of Algar and Father Tolius.

From that moment time and place were blotted out for the two watchers among the sedges.

The resistance of the Saxons was indeed unlooked for. The Danes had separated from their greater numbers, and the contest which followed was sharp and fierce.

"Ah! the earl, the earl!" cried Hal, as the battle went on. "Look thee, Cedric, how the earl forces them back!"

Almost fainting, Cedric rose to his feet, and just then Father Tolius, with his followers, bore down upon the confused Danes. Back, back they pressed, pursued by their maddened foes.

"It is glorious! glorious!" cried Cedric, in gasping tones, and waving his thin hands above his head.

The flashing of the steel, and the crashing of metal against metal filled the space below. At one time the Danes, gaining a new courage, would fling themselves upon the enemy: but the next, with cries of rage, the Saxons would fling them back. All day the battle waged, and as the darkness fell the boys, worn from excitement and loss of food, started back to the abbey.

But almost at the start Cedric fell fainting. There was but one thing to do; taking the slight, unconscious form in his arms, Hal staggered along through the gathering shad-

ows, the awful war-cries ringing in his ears.

He realized for the first, as he stumbled with his burden over the long, rough way, that he should not have taken Cedric without permission, and his fear of the father's anger made him tremble.

Yet not for a moment did he think of shielding himself. Wild and uncared for as his boyhood had been, something had taught Hal the Fleetfoot to be manly and brave and to despise meanness in any form.

It was very dark when he at last tottered into the monastery gates. Not heeding the voice of Brother Ambrose, he went on to the doors of the abbey. These were guarded by two young monks, and the old prior stood anxiously within.

"'Tis Cedric," cried Hal, as he drew near. "I took him to watch the battle. 'Twas no fault of his, father, 'twas mine alone."

The prior came forward, and, in his own

weak arms, took the unconscious boy. Then he looked sternly into Hal's wild, dark face. Perhaps, as he looked, some memory of his long-past boyhood stirred him, for his gaze grew softer.

"Poor lad!" he murmured, "I blame thee not—such deeds are the deeds of youth. Go, get food, but first tell us, how goes the day? Rumor hath it that the Lord of Hosts prevails."

The fire sprang into Hal's weary eyes. "Nay, nay!" he cried; "but the earl and our Father Tolius have won the day!"

All that night the handful of monks in the abbey watched and waited. Cedric tossed and moaned, and only Hal slept through the troubled hours. And out on the dark field of battle the Saxons stood their hard-earned ground, keeping in check the infuriated Danes. But toward daylight, the division which had separated from the smaller

body the day before was called back, and the opposing force was now formidable. At daybreak the battle again broke forth.

And what could a thousand men do against such a mass as now bore down upon them?

Hubba, the fierce sea-king, led the forces of the Danes. The brave Saxons flinched not. They formed in a figure that was shaped like a triangle. The Earl of Algar and his well-drilled men took the centre. The right angle was guarded by Father Tolius and the monks; the left by the sheriff and villagers. They planted their shields so closely together that they touched; they held their strong spears pointed outward, and, standing so, they awaited the attack.

The first shock was terrible, but it broke not their lines. The angered Danes could not get near enough to use their battle-axes,

for that bristling forest of steel seemed invincible.

As the day wore on, a mist gathered upon the desolate moors, and in its dim gloom the battle waged unceasingly. Evening came, and the Danes, wearied with the long resistance, made another attack, after which they wheeled about, feigning defeat. The Saxons were deceived and started in pursuit. In vain did Algar shout his commands for his men to stand firm. In vain did Father Tolius, in the names of all the saints whom they adored, urge his little band to remain. In the wild excitement all was lost. There was naught to do, but for the father and Algar, with the few who would listen, to stand side by side and fight the unequal fight, and this they did, until, in the gray mists of that chill September night, they fell on the dreary moor and were trampled by the victorious Danes.

CHAPTER IV

It was the hour of Matins, and the old prior said that they who watched must be faithful also. So, with his little band, he stood in the beautiful chapel and chanted the solemn mass.

Cedric was beside him, pale and wan, and near by stood Hal, longing to be out in the thick of the fray, yet not daring to disobey the prior, who had forbidden any one leaving the grounds.

While they stood chanting the solemn music, two Saxon youths of the village, who had escaped the horrible massacre, rushed in. They were blood-stained and haggard, and, falling at the prior's feet, moaned out that they alone had escaped, and besought him to defend the abbey, if possible, at once.

The anthem ceased. The arm of the aged prior was raised in command; and his voice, weak, yet powerful in its patient fearlessness, rang out:

"Hear me, my children! Our time for action has come at last. It hath found us ready! Bear away the sacred relics, the vessels of gold and silver and the precious jewels. Take all that is possible for ye to carry. Bury them in the marshes, or sink them in the lake. As for me"—and his fine old face glowed in holy faith—"I will remain with the children, and, by the mercy of God, the foe may take pity upon us and spare us!"

Hal and Cedric clung to him in wild terror. The younger monks sprang to do his bidding; all that could be so hastily gathered was taken across the lake and buried on the Island of Thorns. It was a tedious and wearisome task. All day they labored, go-

ing to and fro. Each time they returned they expected to find the Danes had descended upon the abbey; but the foe waited. Finally, at nightfall, all that was possible, or safe to carry, had been taken. The great doors of the monastery were secured, and the young monks hid themselves in rooms above the entrances, prepared to hurl over any available missile upon which they could lay hands, when the doors were attacked.

The old prior and the frightened boys stood alone in the chapel. Through the windows, they saw the red glow beyond, and they knew that the village had been fired, and that the Danes must be hurrying toward the abbey.

Suddenly, on the quiet night came the shouts of the advancing horde. Then came the tramp of horses over the rustling leaves. And the waiting three saw the banner of

the Danes, on which was depicted the dusky raven.

The whole mass of brutish men came on with deep, threatening curses; they pressed against the doors, and battered them with spears and axes. But the strong doors yielded not to the first attack. Then the monks overhead threw down on the maddened mob stones, spears, shields, anything which they could seize, and this added to the fury of the Danes.

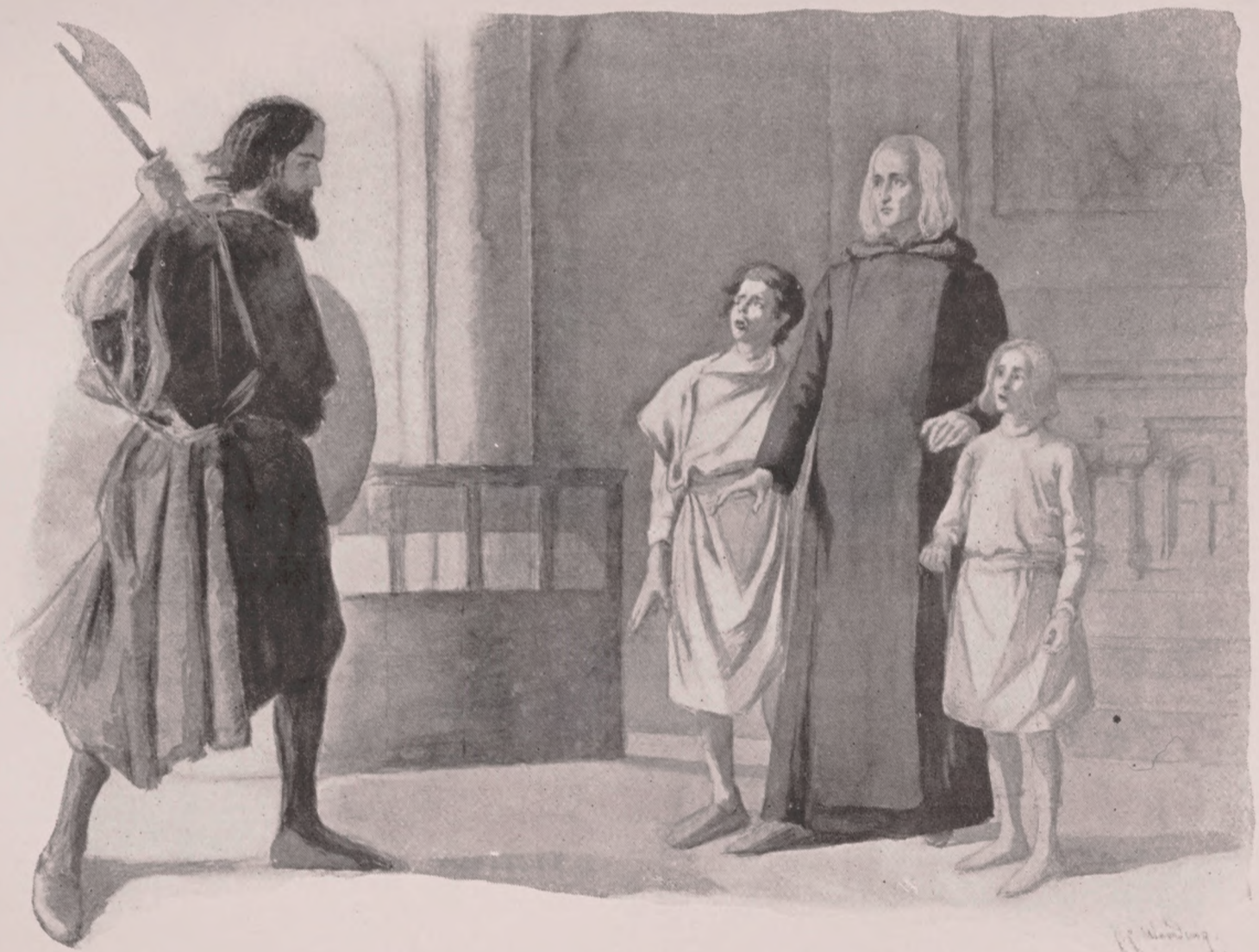
With renewed vigor they hammered on the doors; and at last these gave way, and, with frightful yells of triumph, the foe rushed in.

The prior drew the children closer. No fear shone in his gleaming eyes as he gazed tenderly into Cedric's face. "Sing," he commanded, "sing to Him who alone can give the victory over death!" Then, with an upward glance, he murmured: "I commend my soul to Thee!"

The pitiful childish voices broke into a hymn, and presently the old prior's voice joined theirs, and rang bravely out above the tumult. He stood at the foot of the altar in his long robes, when the doors were broken down. On, on came the crazed leaders, but the little group at the foot of the steps sang on.

Hubba rushed toward them, his awful axe held aloft. The singing made his brain reel. "Silence!" he yelled, and with one sweep hewed the father down, and the children fell over him.

Then did Hal Fleetfoot do the last deed of his life—and may yours and mine be as noble and unselfish. He rolled over, covering Cedric's body with his own, and with upturned face, which did not quiver, he took the blow which was aimed at the little golden head!



"HUBBA RUSHED TOWARD THEM, HIS AWFUL AXE HELD ALOFT."

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CHAPTER V

Cedric gazed in horror, expecting that the next blow would fall upon him. The weight of Hal's body oppressed him; lights flashed before him, and the shouts of the fiendish men stunned his senses.

The man who had struck at him, and had killed poor Hal, turned away, diverted from his work of slaughter by the sight of some treasure.

As he turned, another blood-stained face bent over, and, seeing that Cedric lived, the man raised his axe to finish the work the other had left undone.

Cedric's eyes widened in horror. What was it in the man's ferocious nature that was touched by the innocent, appealing face?

But, as he looked, his hand dropped at his side, and his breath came short and thick. He pushed Hal's body aside with his heavy foot, and, bending down, lifted Cedric up.

They were alone for the instant, for the rush for booty had taken place. Taking off his cassock, the sea-king threw it over the boy. "Quit not my side for a moment," he muttered, and Cedric clung to him.

The search for the richest treasures was in vain, for they were already buried, and guarded on the other side of the lake. Cedric feared each moment that he might be questioned, and a new terror seized him.

But in their fierce anger and disappointment, they noticed him not. At last, worn out with their fruitless efforts, and thinking that all were killed, the savages set fire to the abbey, and prepared to march away, taking with them the cattle, and the lesser

articles of value, which the monks had been unable to hide.

Cedric turned, as he was being dragged away, and looked at the burning monastery. It had been his only home. Among the flaming ruins lay, stilled forever, the hearts which had loved and cared for him. He knew not where he was going or what was to befall him, and fear and exhaustion overcame all other sensations. A heavy sob escaped him, and he stumbled as he blindly struggled on. The man who held him bent and lifted him in his strong arms. "Thou art weary," he whispered in a gruff voice.

"Yes," trembled Cedric, "and my leg hurts, father."

The familiar title fell unconsciously from the child's lips, but it struck strangely on the ears of the man who bore him. He seemed to ponder, his steps slackened, and his breath came hard.

Cedric gained courage as the minutes slipped by. The mighty arms held him firmly, the warmth of the strong body comforted him, a sense of safety stilled his trembling, and he fell asleep.

He dreamed of the terrors through which he had passed; again and again he started feverishly. Dimly he was conscious of a voice saying: "Hush thee, hush thee; sleep in peace"; but it all seemed part of the troubled dream.

He saw the old prior and dear, brave Hal. How nobly they had died! He, alone, was left to mourn and suffer. Suddenly, he awoke. How long he had slept he knew not. The great forest was dim and filled with weird shouts. He was lying under a tree, and a fierce man stood over him. Then he remembered the awful reality. Perhaps his time had come, and, alone out there under the darkness, he was to die. He raised his

head in an agony of terror; the man, who stood near, smiled grimly.

"Thou art but a poor thing," he said, in a deep voice. "How old art thou?"

"I am ten," whispered Cedric, and the effort of speaking made him faint.

"Here, drink!" and a flask was held to his lips. He swallowed and revived.

"Thou art kind," he smiled up into the dark face.

"'Twere better to crush the life out of thee," said the man, "than to let thee live—such a weak, pitiful thing! What canst thou do but suffer and cry and faint?"

"I know not," sobbed the child. "I am a poor lame boy; but I used to help."

After a silence, the gruff voice spoke again, but a new tone caused Cedric to turn.

"I have a little lad at home. Strong and brave is he, but he hath a great tenderness for all things weak and small. He would

defend thee, and for his sake I will spare thy life. Go not alone near the others, they would murder thee, and—I bid thee call me —father; it hath a sound of home." The heavy voice broke, and a deep sigh passed out into the night.

Cedric put out his hand and stroked the foot of the man who had saved him.

Again they started on, Olaf, for such was the man's name, carrying the boy.

But Cedric did not sleep. With returning strength the full horror of his position swept over him. A keen pain shot through his heart, and his blood surged.

What a pitiful thing he was, to lie there in the arms of one who had helped to slay all who had been near and dear to him!

Ah, why was he not strong and brave as Hal had been? He and Olaf were alone; if he were only big, he could perhaps kill this man and so get back to the burning abbey

and the few monks, who, perchance, had been spared.

The blood of his warrior father rose to his brain. Never had he felt hatred before. He clenched his hands together and wildly struck the breast of the giant.

"Art uncomfortable? Here, lie higher," said the deep voice. Then such a sudden sense of his smallness and weakness came over the boy, that he shuddered, and stinging tears filled his eyes. It was of no use. He could never be brave or do a noble deed. He must be carried away like the cattle, and not even struggle.

Poor little lonely fellow! He had the heart of a warrior in the body of a weak child. With a groan, he sank in Olaf's arms, and grew sick with shame.

CHAPTER VI

Hours slipped by unheeded by Cedric, but at last, strong as Olaf was, he grew weary and he put his burden down. The boy opened his eyes and saw that he had been placed beside a pool. It was still dark, and, by the faint glimmer of the moon, he saw Olaf soaking some bread in wine.

Presently he brought it to him and pressed it against his lips. "Eat, if thou canst," he said, "too long hast thou fasted."

Cedric tried to swallow the bread, but could not. "Let me die," he murmured. "I care not to live, and I am but a burden to thee."

"Nay, nay," answered the gruff voice; "say not so. Live for me; thou hast become a comfort."

Something in the hard voice touched Cedric's warm heart, and again he tried, and succeeded in swallowing the crust. In a short time he felt stronger, but they rested beside the pool all that night, and when they took up the march, Cedric walked beside Olaf. So they travelled on, very slowly, often resting, and almost forgetting how far in advance the Danes were. Those were strange days to Cedric. Into his life came a new knowledge. He found that goodness and unselfishness were to be found even among the foe, and that a warm heart may lie under a rough exterior. To him, who had seen goodness only in its mildest, gentlest form, this knowledge came as a deep surprise, and awakened his keenest interest. In the days and nights that followed the boy learned to love and cling to the fierce Dane. Sometimes he even forgot that Olaf was fierce, and they grew quite friendly.

To divert him from the shock and sorrow, Olaf taught the boy to shoot straight and strong. Once Cedric provided, unaided, the evening meal. As they sat over it Olaf grew boisterous.

"Oh, but thou art a fierce warrior!" he laughed, and the forest echoed the mighty sound. "Thou didst bring the bird down like an old hunter!" Then he feigned a great fear, and opened his big eyes wider. "I dare not sleep, so greatly do I mistrust thee. Thou mightest aim at me, to revenge thy wrongs!"

Cedric dropped the morsel which he had raised to his lips, and replied, gravely: "For that did I learn, for I hated thee; but I have grown to love thee now, and I will spare thee for the little son!"

The gleam died out of the mocking eyes. "Thou wouldst make Thor tremble," he muttered, with a half-hearted laugh. "Dost

know the story of Thor? The little lad at home likes it well."

Cedric shook his head. He longed to ask Olaf to permit him to go back alone to the deserted home, but even in his softened mood Cedric dared not put the question.

"Tell me the story," he said, drearily; "perhaps I, too, will like it."

"It may affright thee," Olaf went on, looking teasingly at his little companion; "thou mightest even faint from fear."

Cedric winced. "I will not," he pleaded; "I am stronger now, father."

"Well, then, Thor is a great war god and all his sons are warriors. He lives in the far North amid the snow and ice, where no man's foot hath trod. His throne is upon an iceberg, and when he walks abroad the world trembles and the people down here think the earth quakes."

"Dost thou speak truly?" asked Cedric, his eyes opening in interest.

"Aye, surely. And he has a great red beard, and when he shakes his head, the beard floats on the north wind, and the earth-folk think they see the northern lights."

"Does this Thor often leave his icy home?" questioned Cedric.

"Nay, nay!" and again the lusty laugh rang out; "that is the same question the other lad asked when first he heard the tale. Thor will not trouble thee, poor stripling." Then, after a pause:

"Be strong in spirit, though thy body be but frail.
Might conquers all things. It is a trusty shield."

"It is nothing," Cedric replied, dreamily. "Love conquers all in the end. As thou slept last night I watched before thee, and thy knife lay by thy side. I took it up and saw how sharp it was, and then I remembered thy evil deeds, and a great strength

came to me; I was about to plunge the blade in thy heart, when I remembered thy goodness to me because of thy love for thine own little lad. I dropped the glittering steel and prayed for thee instead. It was love, father, that saved thee. The old prior said that it would yet save the world."

Olaf sprang to his feet, and for a moment bent his troubled eyes upon the pale, crippled child. Then he swore a great oath, and, bending low, took the slim white fingers in his own.

"He and thou shall share alike; I, Olaf, swear it to thee, thou mighty one!"

A great silence fell upon them as Olaf ceased speaking, broken only by a distant shout of the now far-off horde.

They lay down together under Olaf's cassock, no fear in either heart; they had learned to trust each other upon that fourth night of solitary travel.

"Where are we going?" asked Cedric, toward morning.

"To Huntingdon," came the sleepy reply. All the softness and change of the night was gone. Olaf was to all appearances the gruff sea-king once more.

Cedric knew that the Danes meant to attack the monastery at Huntingdon, and his soul sickened. There was no Hal Fleetfoot to warn the monks now, and he who would have saved them if he could lay sheltered beneath the cassock of the foe!

Again the horror of himself and the man beside him overpowered him, and he shook in helpless passion. Olaf was looking at him in a strange, wondering manner.

"Art afraid?" he whispered. "I'll hide thee from harm."

"Nay, nay," came the quick reply. "I think of them!"

A shadow flitted across the stern face.

"List!" said the deep voice. "I dreamed of the little lad last night. This is to be our last day of conflict. Thou and I will go to him—after to-day; but I have a score to settle with Hubba ere I go, an old, old wrong. But after that——" and a strange light came to the hard face, "thou and I will go home, and thou shalt teach him of that courage that thou alone dost know. Come!"

At the end of another day they reached Huntingdon. Against the evening sky they saw the red glow which showed that the deadly work was going on.

Olaf muttered a curse under his breath. He had loitered by the way for Cedric's sake; now, for the first, he realized what the delay had cost him. With dark looks he hunted about for a hiding-place for Cedric, ere he went to settle the ancient wrong with Hubba.

At last he found a cave-like place under an overhanging rock, before which clustered a forest of thick underbrush. Weak, and half dead with loathing, Cedric crouched down in the shelter. Olaf left the wine and some crusts of bread with him, and the rare gems and gold that he usually carried hidden under his own clothing.

Then, wrapping the heavy cassock about the shivering boy, without one backward glance he strode away, walking like one who had cast aside a wearisome and unaccustomed burden. Cedric watched the mighty figure vanish into the gloom. He heard the distant yells of the heathen horde, and saw the red glow against the darkening sky. Then such a loneliness of soul and body fell upon him as he had never known before, even in the past week of torture.

He seemed to be alone in God's universe

with those demons of cruelty and barbarism. Olaf alone had stood between him and certain death, and now Olaf was gone. He looked up into the solemn night; the old familiar stars shone overhead, but how distant and unfriendly they looked! He tried to think of the safe beauty of the nights which seemed so far in the past—the nights when he and the old prior had paced the paths of the beautiful monastery garden. But the peaceful memory would not stay; in its place came ever the memory of the massacre, and of that silver head laid low at the altar steps. Sobs shook the boy's frame, and deadly fear clutched at his heart.

He tried to pray, but the roars of the tyrants bewildered him. He stood up and, flinging his arms above his head, he cried aloud for help. His brain reeled and he laughed and wept in delirious terror. Finally unconsciousness came to his relief, and he

sank down among the costly treasure of gold and jewels, and forgot his misery.

The hours dragged on, but Cedric heeded not. The silence in the cave was sometimes broken by a faint moan, and once or twice the little hand was outstretched, as if the faithful heart remembered its duty; but that was all.

As the gray morn began to break, Cedric awoke. He was chilled and cramped, but a strange thing had happened. No longer did fear and weakness fill him. He was calm, and almost happy. He knew it not, but God had strengthened him for his day of battle. He dipped the crusts of bread in the wine, as he had seen Olaf do, and ate them eagerly—then he looked forth into the forest. The glare was still reddening the sky, the shouting was distinct, but not as loud. He knew that the Danes were gathering the plunder.

While he stood listening and watching, he heard a rustling of the dead leaves, and shrank back. Two eyes of fire gleamed at him, and from the bushes there sprang a lean wolf. For a moment they gazed at each other, and then, with brute instinct, the wolf darted past him and made for the smoking abbey, knowing that he would fare better there. Cedric shivered, and drew the cassock about him. Another rustling startled him. He breathed shorter, and his eyes widened. Then he heard his name. He listened; again it came: "Cedric! Cedric!"

Could it be Olaf's voice that fell on his ear? He leaned out of the opening and paused.

"Help! help!" came the weak cry.

Cedric limped out now quite fearlessly. "Father, where art thou?"

"Here!" And, looking under the bushes a few yards away, Cedric saw Olaf creeping

toward him on his hands and knees, often falling forward on his face. He was ghastly pale and his clothing was torn and blood-stained.

The child knelt down beside the wounded Dane and drew the shaggy head to his breast. "Go no further," he pleaded, in strong, tender tones. "I have yet some wine and bread—I will get them."

"No, no!" moaned the man. "Leave me not. I have crept here to die. The way was long and hard; but thou wast alone—poor little lad!

"I found Hubba"—the voice grew thick and slow. "That wrong is settled; but—we'll never get to that little lad now. And thou, child, what wilt thou do alone?"

"I am not afraid, father." Cedric smoothed the matted hair from the damp brow with gentle touch. He was doing what he had



"LEAN CLOSER, FATHER. SEE, I WILL PUT MY ARMS ABOUT THEE. I AM STRONG."

told Hal he could do: helping the wounded, and making the dying feel less lonely.

"Lean closer, father," he whispered. "See, I will put my arms about thee. I am strong."

For a moment there was silence; then: "Canst thou sing, child? They sing as they die, these holy ones. Their courage is not mine. Canst thou sing to me?"

Ah, now indeed had Cedric been asked to do something that he could do. No fear of foe or wild animal knew he then. His clear voice rang out right gloriously in a chant of victory. It thrilled through the awakening light like the voice of an angel. The wild man who lay a-dying gazed in rapt wonder, while Cedric, with white face uplifted to the flushing sky, sang on and on.

The chant ceased; the weak voice gasped his name, then said, hoarsely: "They thought that I remained with thee to get the hidden

treasure at Croysland. They thought me a traitor; but I went only to find Hubba, and I left him out yonder among the ruins—but he dealt me this blow, and now what wilt thou do?"

"I fear them not," said the boyish voice.

Olaf's head sank heavier on the little shoulder. "Think not of the treasure should they find thee; but this——" and he weakly drew a curious ring from his finger, "if thou canst in the future, find our—my little lad, give it to him—it was his mother's, and—let him learn of thee—tell him, love, love, will conquer when all else fails. Sing, sing!"

The sweet voice floated out. Birds ceased their matins to listen in wonder, and, while the words of triumph filled the air, the soul of Olaf went forth into greater light, led by the instinct which had guided him to spare a helpless child, and to learn of him.

Cedric bent and kissed the dead face. It

was not horrible to him. He had seen death in such hideous forms, that the passing of Olaf seemed almost beautiful.

And the kiss which fell on the cold cheek might have been dropped there by the little Danish son, so full of love and tenderness was it—a touching tribute to the dead man's deed of pity.

CHAPTER VII

The silence was soon broken by triumphant yells. Three fierce Danes had tracked Olaf by the blood-stains, and had come to avenge their leader's death.

They were giants of strength and height, but they fell back when they saw Cedric holding the dead Olaf. They probably thought that, after using the boy as a guide to the Croysland treasure, Olaf had killed him. To see him sitting there, pale and fearless, was a surprising sight indeed.

Then one of them laughed a brutal laugh. "'Tis a great find we have here!" he shouted. "Not only Olaf and his plunder, but the white lad from Croysland, alive, and, I doubt me not, able to talk to others beside Olaf if it be made worth his while."

Cedric flinched not. He was his father's son now. His bodily weakness was as naught beside the lion heart. He gazed into the three hard faces without a quiver, and the laugh died from their lips.

"The treasure," cried one.

Cedric pointed to the hiding-place. "He needs it no more," said the gentle voice; "nor do I. Take it."

One went in and dragged out the gems which Cedric had guarded. "The other?" asked the second voice, and the man plunged his hand roughly under Olaf's loose clothing.

Cedric started at that, but spoke no word. He merely touched the dead face with his lips. "And now," said the third giant, and his voice was terrible indeed, "we shall deal with thee, my pale-faced lad. Was there treasure hidden at Croysland?"

Cedric nodded his golden head.

"And Olaf found it?"

"No!" The boy's voice spoke the one word proudly.

"Dost thou know where it is?"

"Yes." The pale face bent lower.

"List, then," said the harsh voice. "Tell us where it is; or lead us to it. No harm shall come to thee, that will I swear. And afterward thou shalt be put on board a vessel and carried to safety and plenty. Woman's care shalt thou have, and gold and silver that will make thy future rich and great. But if thou liest, thou Saxon whelp——" here the fierce voice broke, and the eyes gleamed, "thy death shall be no easy thing, I warrant thee. Speak up, lad, where?"

Now, indeed, had come Cedric's time of battle—the battle to be fought without shield or sword. Was the teaching of the old prior to be in vain? It was a terrific struggle. Before him stood those three cruel

men, ready and eager for his death. The treasure hidden on the Island of Thorns might never be of use to the few monks who were yet alive; he was not even sure that they had survived the slaughter. If it lay with none to tend it, why not let these men have it? He needed it not nor desired it; but his weak body longed for rest and safety! In that moment of doubt the memory of the old prior came to him, and at the thought of woman's care, his mother's image rushed before him. Hal Fleetfoot had dared to die, had died to save him. All the others had faced death fearlessly, and now he had his chance to be brave and defend his honor.

"Speak, speak," said the leader, touching his gleaming axe. "There *was* a treasure?"

"Yes."

"Dost know where it is hidden?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"That will I not tell thee! No; not if I should be cut to pieces. Never will I tell!"

"Die, then, Saxon dog!" hissed one. The gleaming blade was raised, and, for the second time, death seemed sure to little Cedric. But again was he spared. A shout startled them. Others had tracked the blood, and were after Olaf's booty.

"Hide, hide!" muttered one of the three. "They'll finish the Saxon whelp, and the dead tell no tales."

They fled into the forest, while the cries of the pursuers came on. For an instant Cedric watched them, then he sprang up. Love of life was strong in him; his last chance had come! The three Danes were retracing their steps, the oncoming foe came almost from the same direction.

The way back to Croysland lay open to him! With all the strength that remained in him, he would try to get back, and warn

the monks, if, indeed, they were alive, or at the least lie down and die among them who had loved him so tenderly.

With a hurried kiss of farewell to Olaf, he fled on. He knew that his little steps would not attract attention, while the steps of the mighty three could be so plainly heard; they might fight for the plunder—what cared he? He would save the rest if God gave him strength—save them as dear, brave Hal had tried to do. Oh! God was good to give him, poor little lame Cedric, a chance at last to serve them who would have died for him!

On, on he ran. The lame leg dragged painfully, but he heeded it not. A miraculous power filled his body. His golden curls floated on the autumn wind, his panting breath came quicker and shorter, but on, on he went! When he was at last too weary to go further, he knelt down by a brookside and drank feverishly; then, covering his

body with leaves, lay still and rested. When he was refreshed, he went on again; stopping now and then, he gathered nuts and ate them as he ran.

So, resting and running, the day passed. Night came, and in the darkness Cedric felt safer, and hastened his speed. The roar of wild animals broke the midnight silence. Eyes of hungry wolves glared at him from the bushes. He sang snatches of hymns to make his heart brave, and the beasts shrank back, as they might have done from one of God's angels.

Over the rough way that had taken Olaf and him five days to travel, the brave child went in a day and a night. Toward morning he saw the glow of the still burning Abbey of Croysland. He had fled from fire and bloodshed, and fire and horror awaited him; yet, with a glad heart, he felt as if he were nearing home.

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The monks who had remained on the Island of Thorns had escaped, and, after the departure of the Danes, had returned to the abbey and fought bravely to subdue the flames, and to save as much as was possible of the splendid structure. They succeeded in saving the greater part, and upon the morning of Cedric's return they were gathering the charred remains of the murdered fathers, for burial.

Sorely were they weeping over their task, when Cedric rushed in upon them. They paused in their mournful labor, gazed upon him, and then fell upon their knees, crossing themselves, and calling upon the saints. For they thought that they beheld a vision.

Cedric could not speak for a moment, and his white face, framed in his golden hair, seemed indeed unearthly in the dim morning light. "The treasures!" he gasped, at last; "save them, for the Danes will come again."

Then did the monks realize that he spoke to them in the body, and they fell at those little tired feet, kissed the rags of his clothing, and gathered him in their arms.

"Hide yourselves, hide me," sobbed Cedric; "I can do no more."

A great roaring sound filled the boy's ears, a dense blackness covered the faces clustering about him, and Cedric knew nothing further. When he awoke, an eternity seemed to have passed. He lay in the arms of Brother Ambrose, the dwarf. They were in an underground vault. Beside the narrow couch upon which he rested was a small table, upon which stood bread and wine.

Cedric felt feebly for the chain about his neck; it was there, and the two rings—Olaf's and his own—upon it!

"All's safe," wheezed Ambrose, who seemed to have suffered from exposure. "Thou camest in time, son."



"THEY WERE IN AN UNDERGROUND VAULT. BESIDE THE NARROW COUCH UPON WHICH HE RESTED WAS A SMALL TABLE UPON WHICH STOOD BREAD AND WINE."

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Cedric tried to speak, but only succeeded in whispering: "I thought that thou wast killed, brother."

"Not I!" laughed the old man. The sound cheered the boy. He had almost forgotten that any one could laugh.

"I had a narrow escape," Ambrose went on,—"what one might call a merry squeeze. I was on duty at the gates that night that the Danish fiends paid us their first visit. And, seeing that they were eager to get in, I politely let slip the locks when the mass of them were pressing most unmannerly. Thou shouldst have seen them plunge in, one on top of his neighbor. Heigho! but it was a rare sight. The gate went back with a slam and Brother Ambrose was wedged safe and fast behind his own bars."

"And then? what then, brother?" broke in Cedric's weak voice.

"Ah! well, a man must have his little joke,

say I, even in the face of death. So I lay low among the vines and tree roots, and when the first mad rush was over, I put my hand and arm through the bars, down close to the ground, and every leg that came near enough I grappled. Many a Dane bit the dust in the darkness, with a brother rogue a-top of him. And it was a blessed sound to hear them curse their luck and the tree roots. Aye, but I had my little play before the horror came."

Cedric tried to clap his hands, but they fell limply apart. "Thou art so jolly," he sighed. "But they came again afterward?" he asked.

"Aye, and they did, the knaves; but they had their trip for naught. Thou didst outrun them, son," and a tear glistened in Ambrose's dim eyes. "Such a little, weak lad, and yet so brave!"

"Have they gone, brother?"

"Oh, aye, aye—and alive, bad luck to them! We dared not fling rocks or spears. Taking all in consideration, we let them think us dead. We crept in under the smoking ruins, and hid in the vaults. We were too much for them the second time."

Cedric gave a sigh of relief; and Ambrose rambled on: "Had I my way, lad, I'd make thee abbot, that I would, with long, trailing robe and all the rest."

Cedric laughed aloud, and the sound pleased Ambrose mightily:

"Hark thee," he said. "After the Danes left for the second time, the monks who had escaped at Huntingdon came—they are with us now. Soon we will rebuild the abbey, part still remains, and then shalt thou stand at the gates as of yore. Dost remember the gray mantle, son? That was a trick, and a good one."

The smile fled from Cedric's face. "But

there will be no Hal Fleetfoot to watch for now, brother. Oh! what shall I do?"

The long pent-up tears gave way. And that was the very best thing that could have happened to little Cedric. He wept himself to sleep, and when he awoke he was refreshed and comforted, and they who watched beside him knew that he would live.

Of course there were dark days ahead—days full of painful toil and desolate heart-ache for all; but they worked manfully and courageously, and in the end rebuilt their abbey and continued their peaceful lives.

The firelight flickers and fades away. The gentle fingers, which have led me so patiently through the half-forgotten paths of that ancient time, slip from mine. I can follow thee, little Saxon Cedric, no further. I wish that I might know that, at some future time in thy life, the lonely Danish boy, for whose

dear sake thy brave life was spared, could have come within the safe shelter of thy love, and that thou hadst fulfilled the dying wish of Olaf, thy friend.

But the old history contains no other mention of thy name, though I have searched patiently and long.

* * * * * * * *

And so I leave him as I found him, standing by the vine-covered gateway, his little hands outstretched in generous welcome, giving freely in the memory of one for whom he watched in the past, but who will not come again.

Fare thee well, my little Saxon boy of long ago. That dark time was brighter because of thy pure life. I trust that thy days were many and happy among the grateful hearts who, but for thee, might never have known the blessedness of the more peaceful days.

THE END

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